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LEISURE

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512-Year-Old Count Dracula Said More Visible Than Ever

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — Count Dracula is alive and thriving — as he has been for the past 512 years — although he is more visible than ever.

The blood-sucking vampire is the subject of a Broadway play, a television series and two major pictures after years of lying dormant in his coffin with only occasional forays into activity since 1931 when "Dracula" became a hit movie.

Hungarian-born Bela Lugosi proved that if a movie actor plays a single role brilliantly onto his life he will become forever associated with the characterization.

The white-faced, gimlet-eyed Lugosi played Dracula in a serious vein only once, 48 years ago. At his death in 1956, his obituaries inevitably tied him to the weirdo Transylvania vampire.

Actually, Lugosi played Dracula twice, the second time in a 1948 turkey titled "Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein."

He did, however, play all sorts of middle European vampire types in the '30s and '40s, wearing a flowing cape, black suits, fangs and red-rimmed eyes. He eventually became a drug addict and died in near obscurity.

Dracula was revived somewhat in a dozen English horror films, most of which starred Christopher Lee. John Carradine once assayed the role as did David Niven, playing an aging Dracula. There was even a black version of the bloodthirsty count in "Blacula."

George Hamilton will soon be seen as Dracula in "Love at First Bite."

Raul Julia starrs in the Broadway "Dracula" from which a movie is being made starring Frank Longella in the title role and Laurence Oliver.

Most visible Dracula at the moment is Michael Nouri, who portrays the kooky Count in "The Course of Dracula," a weekly 26-minute segment of NBC-TV's "Cliffhangers." It may become an hourly series next season.

Nouri, whose family comes from the Middle East — "My father was born in Baghdad" — is handsome, friendly and 34 years old. He looks more like a leading man than the Balkan nobleman jugular freak.

Dracula was the brainstorm of Bram Stoker, an English novelist who wrote the Gothic horror story of the 19th century.

Nouri read the old book before accepting the role. It scared him enough to convince him he could play the role in the TV series.

"It's a very compelling story," Nouri said. "And I guess it really got to Lugosi. He was so much into the part that I understand he was buried with his cape on. But that won't happen to me.

"The way I see it, Transylvania is sort of the Appalachia of Romania. And God knows Dracula had a problem about turning into a vampire bat. So I sort of play the part tang-in-cheek.

"He's the hero of the show, so I do my best to make him sympathetic. It's no easy task to make a guy look good who lures beautiful women into his lair so he can suck the blood from their necks.

"You have to see him as a tragic figure who destroys the object of his loves."

Nouri's Dracula is as susceptible to religious symbolism and daylight as was Lugosi, and heaven help him should anyone show up with a wooden stake while he's grabbing a few Zs in his coffin.

A crucifix or a few drops of holy water terrify the count who is destined to live forever providing he can escape the trappings of Christianity.

"We try to avoid the camp aspect involved in the cliffhanger format," Nouri said, "and play Dracula seriously as they did in the old movies.

"Before starting the show I saw several Dracula pictures. Christopher Lee was my favorite in the role. But Lugosi was in a class by himself. He originated the role as far as I'm concerned.

"We've focused our stories on the tragic curse of Dracula rather than the fangs. He is a man who has been in a predicament for more than 500 years. He cannot be exposed to sunlight and he is destined to drink blood to exist.

"We try to have serious things going in an absurd context. Our aim is to have viewers feel sorry for this man.

"There's a certain sex appeal about Dracula for women viewers. He never attacks his victims. He lures them into his own quarters. They come to him of their own volition. He is very cool and laid back.

"When I walk into a restaurant or other public places, a lot of women recognize me and show me their throats for laughs. And I get letters from ladies telling me I can bite their necks any time.

"The popularity of Dracula is really the element of fear which both attracts and repulses people. Most of us like to be shaken up and scared a little bit, especially by the bizarre and unusual.

"The role gives an actor an opportunity to pull out all the stops and I'm having the time of my life playing the old boy."

Hidalgo Students Given Check-ups

HIDALGO — The University of Texas medical team from the Galveston Branch has completed all physicals and follow-up services for Hidalgo Independent School District students.

Approximately 205 children were screened this school year and about 38 children required and obtained follow-up services. Most common deficiencies detected in this area was dental with eyesight closely behind.

Obesity was a common factor, according to personnel director Luis X. Gonzalez and assistant principal Jesus Salinas.

This project was obtained free of charge for all students in Hidalgo schools through H.E.W. funding.

Dental work was done on approximately 128 students in all grade levels. Hidalgo ISD contracted with Amigos Internacionales to do the dental work. Dr. Stuart Sibley was in charge.

Another 50 to 60 children will be helped with dental needs soon and additional work will be performed this summer.

'Lady Buckeye' Planning Meet

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lady Buckeye dropped by recently to explain a project that's taken up most of her time recently, the 1st International Convention of CBers, to be held here this summer.

She expects between 40,000 and 40,000 citizens band radio fans from across the country to take advantage of the vacation season to attend the June 29-July 2 convention.

CBers from overseas also have expressed interest, including a group from Australia that already has chartered a plane for the trip.

Top Federal Communications Commission officials, congressmen and industry representatives will be on hand to answer questions about CB radio and to demonstrate its uses.

The American Lung Association, which will receive the net proceeds from the convention, is helping to plan the event.

Lady Buckeye is Susan Blazavich, a registered nurse from Marietta, Ohio, and a CBer for 16 years.

Why is she spending so much time on this project?

"Well, I've been a member of Marietta CB organizations for six years," she replies, "but we could never get everyone from the government and industry out there together to answer our questions about CB."

So she decided to bring the CBers to Washington.

When they get here, she says, they'll be met by representatives of the FCC, the Department of Transportation and lawmakers who have agreed to participate in various panels discussing such topics as CB regulations, other personal radio services including ham and general mobile radio, the proposed 900-channel citizens band communications band and public safety uses of CB.

"This will be an opportunity for all CBers to visit on a personal basis with those who make and enforce the nation's laws and influence the use of CB channels," she says.

"Virtually every CB equipment manufacturer will be on hand with a display of products," she adds. Merchandise will be available for purchase, often at special "convention" prices.

There'll be entertainment too, with shows by country singers Donna Fargo on June 29 and Conway Twitty on July 1. Dances also are planned for the nights of June 29 and 30.

Those interested in the International Convention of CBers should contact Susan Blazavich at 14 Bela Vista Drive, Marietta, Ohio 45750.

Singer Says He Has Special Thing Going with Almighty

HOLLYWOOD (AP) — Peabo Bryson likes to tell a story about the day he walked into the Federal Housing Administration to ask for a loan.

He was 19 at the time, the oldest son in a fatherless family living in a six-room coldwater flat in Greenville, S.C.

"I was making $46 a week working in a band as a singer," he recalls. "I went to these FHA people, and I swear to this day they don't know why they gave me a loan.

"I wasn't making enough money to start with. I wasn't old enough, secondly . . . it was against the law! But they did it, and I got it, and I moved from the ghetto."

The FHA people who gave Bryson his loan didn't have any way of knowing that they were dealing with a future pop and soul music star. But none of his achievements has ever really surprised Bryson, who tells the story by way of illustrating a special thing he seems to have going with the Almighty.

"God's not fashionable in this era, hasn't been for quite some time," Bryson said, lounging in his hotel room during a recent tour. "But He's always fashionable to me, man. On the road to FHA I talked with Him a lot.

"I was just as determined then as I am now, and really quite as happy," he added. "I don't need any commandments from anybody. I did what I had to do."

He certainly did. Bryson, a slight and boyish-looking 28, has long since left Greenville and grinding poverty behind him. He lives in Atlanta now and wears elegant white suits when he performs.

"He probably makes more than $40 a minute doing so.

Given his background and his religious convictions, Bryson could easily have ended up as a gospel singer. He did start out singing in church before going professional at 15.

Readily Available Marijuana Sought For Some Patients

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal court is being asked to force the government to make marijuana more readily available to cancer and glaucoma patients.

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws said in a suit filed Wednesday that marijuana shows promise of relieving suffering for cancer and glaucoma patients. But the suit said the government continues to classify it with drugs that have no medical value, he marijuana reform group accused the Department of Health, Education and Welfare of violating federal law by refusing to act on its 21-month-old petition to reclassify marijuana.

Fiedler Has New Namesake

BOSTON (AP) — Boston Pops maestro Arthur Fiedler has a new namesake — a 100-foot-long firetruck.

"I hope I deserve it," said the beaming 84-year-old Fiedler, who makes a hobby of fire-engine chasing.

Deputy Fire Chief John McCarthy said the truck will be called the Arthur Fiedler Memorial. Aerial Tower 2 is scheduled Wednesday in City Council chambers, the Museum of Transportation also named the firehouse holding its fire collection after Fiedler.

Three days earlier, Fiedler had returned to the podium to lead the Boston Symphony in a four-minute rendition of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." It was his first performance since undergoing brain surgery in December.

FROM HORROR TO HILARIOUS — Actor Bela Lugosi (left) terrified audiences with his portrayal of the legendary Count Dracula; but actor George Hamilton (right) in the latest rendition of the neck-nibbling Count in American International's movie "Love At First Bite" turns the story into a comedy. (AP Laserphoto)

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